

|8|bandry, to achieving maximum benefits with a minimum of original invention. Similarly, in non-material culture, a minimum of effort has gone into the elaboration, amendment or improvement of institutions of social organization, but a great deal of ingenuity has gone into spiritual elaborations such as the Zar-cult.

Such a disposition of human energy seems strange and out of balance particularly to the Western mind. How can it be explained?

Perhaps the major clue is contained in the Amhara proverb:

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"From cleverness of hand, (you get) serfdom;
from cleverness of mouth (you become) boss."

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This has long been a basic Amhara attitude, even a world view for them. The Amhara has seen much justification for associating skill of hand with slavery and near-slave status, while associating mental and spiritual skills with leadership: as military officer, judge, bishop, or zar-doctor.

If he becomes impoverished, an Amhara will go to a district where he is not known (in order not to shame his family) to work at some unskilled labor. He is then less despised than if he were to learn a skilled manual trade. For while the first can be excused as a temporary mishap, or smiled off as a lark, the latter, by his painstaking application to a manual skill, indicates a permanent association with the psychological and social patterns in the "slave category". Moreover, he may, in his apprenticeship, become associated not only with the occupation and socially lower status of his teacher, but, since the latter is

461 often a member of a socially lower ethnic group (see sec-
554 tion B), such an Amhara would become "detrribalized", sus-
pected of having learned occult powers (e.g. in smith-
craft), and suspected of being no longer an observant and
563 believing Copt. As a result of his ostracism, he may then
461 very likely marry a girl from the socially lower ethnic
554 group, and his children would be social halfbreeds. If that
ethnic group were Shanqalla (negroid, ex-slave), his chil-
dren would also be racially, as well as socially, mixed, and
be relegated to the servant class. Thus the prediction of
the proverb would have come full cycle. This process can
be observed in Gondar, Addis Ababa, and wherever a market
town develops out of the more conservative, rural milieu.

566 Before the abrogation of the major feudal privileges
463 by the present emperor, the feudal lord could and did put
skilled specialists to work without specific wages or limit
of service. Moreover, the skilled specialist would often
be worse off than the unskilled serf. For while the latter
would at least be permitted, usually, to remain at his place
of origin, the skilled specialists were very often required
to accompany the feudal troops and resettle in an alien
province, cut off from their kinfolk.

Smiths had to produce and repair weapons, masons to
build churches, weavers to make togas and adornments, brew-
ers of honeywine and musician-bards to prepare feasts and
entertainments, etc. The chief quartermaster and "treasurer"
carried the title "bajirond" and was usually a skilled and
trusted master craftsman himself. In reward, he and some
of the other skilled specialists might be allocated new

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- sega byet - where meat is stored after sundrying in strips;
- wät byet - the kitchen hut;
- gemja byet - the "treasury" house, general storehouse of tools and weapons, drums, decorations.
- tej byet - honeymead brewery; talla byet - beer brewery, worked by women.
- engeda byet- guest hut;
- adarash - reception hut, larger, less solid, used for banqueting;
- mānyeta byet - (lit. bedroom house), the master's bedroom hut;
- "mad byet" - dining hut for daily dining.

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The noble also has carpets ("sägaJa") to sit on or, in feudal tents, to use as tapestry. These are carried from long distances, where specialists live, or are imported. He also has hardwood stools ("dekkwa") to sit on, cut out of solid tree trunks. In a wooden storage box he has one or several burnos, and one or several "kaba" (a dark, woolen mantle). Guests receive their coffee in small imported glazed china cups instead of clay ones, and the reed table is a "massob worq", with dyed braids of imported dyes, in geometric designs.

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C. What Nature Provides: Lumbering, Hunting, Fishing, Collecting

Much of what little ingenuity goes into Amhara material culture is applied to the direct exploitation of natural resources. He would rather spend days and weeks

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●461 searching for suitably shaped hard or soft saplings and other woods and certain herbs, than perform carpentry or much transplanting. Apart from saddle-making, the alga-bed, and simple musical instruments, one can hardly speak of any carpentry.

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313 In preparation for housebuilding and other activities connected with lumbering, the timber provided by nature is divided, in the Amhara view, into two major categories: Male, i.e. hard wood or strong wood; Female or soft, less consistent, or easily pliable woods. Heaviness or lightness are not major categories (as in Western countries).

Male woods ("wandē enchāt") and their uses include the following:

Wild Olive Tree ("wāyra") (*olea chrysophylla*), one of the hardest; often heavy and massive, found on the edge of forests, brown-black in color, quite oily. Used for construction on plateau, e.g. as saplings for walls, rafters, etc. The small twigs are in common use as "toothbrushes". They are chewed and used to clean teeth and polish gums, as a leisure-time activity after meals.

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"Janza" (*Cordia abyssinica*), a light but hard wood which is found very commonly and is therefore popular; used to make the yokes of oxen, saddles, low, round chairs and other equipment that takes much punishment in use, such as riflestocks when the original has broken.

"Mulkeffa" (*Dombeya Bruceana*), very hard, used for clubs, e.g. as pestle in the women's crushing of barley.

243 patient oxen. If the farmer has no ex-slave retainers, his wife may help in the harvest. Even young boys help, particularly in protecting crops. The direction of the breeze is carefully observed before winnowing. Work proceeds from sunrise to sundown (from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M.), with a rest from noon to 3 P.M., the hottest time of the day. At that time the women bring barley beer, enjara bread, and a special condiment prepared from crushed "nug" oilseeds called "anābabār".

Threshing by sticks instead of oxen is done in harvest of the "nug" and this may require some additional helpers.

241 Oil plants are cultivated and of considerable importance in the diet. They are considered field crops rather than garden crops:

"nug" (*Guizotia abyssinica*), the black Niger Seed, which is the most used vegetable oil of the Amhara. Travellers take it along, mixed with spices, as a staple. It is used in many items of diet. After crushing, the oil cakes are used for fuel (not fodder).

Flax seed (*Linum usitatissimum*), called "talba", the second most common oilseed, of light brown color, consumed in similar ways and in drinks. It is not raised for the fiber, which is considered fodder or fuel.

Castor bean (*Ricinus communis*), called "gulqwas" or "qachma". This is not a field crop as much as nug and talba, and not as much of a staple. Tanners use it for lubrication of skins. The emperor has urged increased production, but there

462 B. THE ETHNIC DIVISION OF LABOR.
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[461] Division of labor according to the ethnic origin of of the worker is the most distinctly organized division among the Amhara. This is based on the attitude of the Amhara that labor (especially skilled labor and manual labor) is dishonorable. This attitude is reinforced by the close kinship ties which prevent a cultural deviant from shaming the members of his family by working in the district where they are known. It also reinforces the the ethnic boundary lines, and forces the non-Amhara, non-Coptic, working ethnic groups to live within the circle of their own kinfolk, religious groups, and hamlets.

[281] One of the most despised is the class of the Faqi,
[191] the tanners, who speak old-Cushitic languages such as Agau, are considered "pagans" in religion, and are associated by their trade with the hunters, the lowest class.

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[191] On a slightly higher level are the ironsmiths, usually of Falasha, who practice Mosaic Judaism, used to speak Quarinya, an old-Cushitic language, but use the same Semitic Geez language as the Copts in their religious worship and biblical liturgy.

563 This use of Geez by the Falasha
463 is puzzling to the Coptic priests, and brings about a
754 sort of grudging respect for the Falasha, which somewhat
326 elevates their status above that of the tanners. But
[191] they are suspected of practicing black magic in connection with their smithing of iron. Patrons take magic precautions to counteract all sorts of magic bewitchment by the Falashas whenever they have contact with them.

[pp. 1-20 have not been processed for the files.-Analyst]

CAP. XI.—*Of the fashion and situation of the monasteries and their customs, first this of St. Michael.*

346 The manner of these monasteries as to their sites and
361 customs: all are situated on the greatest and highest cliffs, or the deepest they can find. This one of St. Michael is situated on a very steep rock at the foot of another very high rock, where no one can ascend. The stone of which these rocks consist is of the grain of the walls of the port of Portugal.¹ They are very great rocks. The land around 137 these rocks is all covered with very great forests, and besides wild olive trees and high grass between them, in which there is much basil. The trees which are not wild olive trees are not trees known to us; all are without fruit. In the narrow valleys which belong to this monastery there are orange trees, lemon trees, citron trees, pear trees and fig trees of all kinds, both of Portugal and India; peach trees, cabbages, coriander, cardamine, wormwood,² myrtle and other sweet-smelling and medicinal herbs, all ill profited by ● [461] because they are not good working men: and the earth produces these like wild plants, and it would produce whatever was planted and sown in it. The monastery house 346 looks quite like a church building, constructed like ours. It has around it a circuit like a cloister, covered above in the same manner as the body of the monastery. It has three entrances, as ours are, one principal one, and two side ones. The roof of the church and of its cloisters is of wild straw, which lasts a man's life: the body of the church is built with naves very well constructed, and their arches are

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

423 'foreigners', and even though, within the group ownership, there was individual and family ownership of the land.

461 The allocation of and the succession to the land was governed by ancient custom. This custom varied greatly because, as d'Abbadie said, 'In Ethiopia one of the despairs of the traveller, who thinks he knows the country, is to discover, sometimes by chance, that such and such a community, comprising a family, a part of a village, or district is of a different origin from the population which surrounds it.' In internal land and family matters, it would keep its own private law.¹ In some communities there were meetings at fixed intervals of three to seven years according to the region and at which the reallocation between families of the different types of land, which was in several categories according to its fertility, was arranged. Apart from these adjustments by agreement, land went from father to son. Land transactions were announced by the public crier and registered, generally by entry in a Bible or other book, in the 'parish' church. The penal code of 1930 decreed up to three years' imprisonment for failure to register transactions in hereditary land,² but this decree may not have been fully effective in the provinces by 1935. Transactions were always carried out before witnesses. These sometimes included young children who might be given a feast of the delicacy of fried grain in order to fix the event in their memories.

Land matters, indeed, were settled within such land-holding groups with little intervention from higher authority so long as all its members gave what was due to the government or to the representative of the government. Their relations with this representative would be through their family and the heads of their family group and it is obvious that a community with this degree of autonomy in the vital matters of land and tribute, in addition to the minor legislative and judicial powers already described,³ might be regarded as largely self-governing in local matters. Such *restenya*, or hereditary land-holders, were further fortified in their position by the recognition of private property in the *Fetha Nagast*. In Menelik's later days, his council confirmed this position by a decree in which it was promised that except in cases of rebellion and treason even criminals should not be dispossessed from such tenure.⁴ This provision was repeated in clause 9 of the penal code of 1930. It is probable that it was unbroken settlement by an Amhara tribal community which alone could offer effective resistance to royal and other pressure.

423 The Emperor would, however, seize every opportunity of breaking

¹ d'Abbadie, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

² Clause 458.

³ See above, p. 142.

⁴ Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, p. 611.

63 / *The World of the Amhara Peasants*

in January. But the giant of holidays in this season is Epiphany, about a fort-565*
 night after Christmas. The holiday commemorates the baptism of Jesus; the 796
 name of the holiday, *Ṭimqat*, means "baptism." In preparation for Ṭimqat
 new clothes are given to children and the adults' *shammā*, grown very gray [296]
 over the months, are washed in every household.

The program for Ṭimqat is long and complicated. At sunset on the eve of
 the holiday, the people don their white clothes and repair to the local church,
 from whence they escort the *sābot* to a place where it will spend the night—
 near some stream or pool. They go home for supper, and return to that site
 for singing and dancing until late at night. About two o'clock in the morning
 Mass is performed, after which quantities of *dābo* and *tallā* are consumed. [778]
 Toward dawn, or shortly after, the clergy bless the water and sprinkle it on [851]
 those assembled. Many like to bathe in the sanctified water at this time. It is
 the occasion for baptizing the children of syphilitic mothers and those who
 want to be rebaptized.

By noon on Ṭimqat Day a large crowd has assembled at the ritual site,
 those who went home for a little sleep having returned, and the holy ark is
 escorted back to its church in colorful procession. The clergy, bearing robes
 and umbrellas of many hues, perform follicking dances and songs; the elders
 march solemnly with their weapons, attended by middle-aged men singing a
 long-drawn, low-pitched *haaa hooo*; and the children run about with sticks
 and games. Dressed up in their finest, the women chatter excitedly on their
 one real day of freedom in the year. The young braves leap up and down in
 spirited dances, tirelessly repeating rhythmic songs. When the holy ark has
 been safely restored to its dwelling-place, everyone goes home for feasting.
 In the meantime, the eyes of gamesome men and women have met and secret
 rendezvous have been arranged.

Ṭimqat ushers in a season of weddings, which comes to an abrupt end with [585]
 the onset of the great fast before Easter. For eight long weeks, body and spirit [785]
 are depressed by the heavy fasting requirements. The mood reaches a climax
 in the final week of Lent. Then no heavy work is allowed, and the more [461]
 devout peasants go to church many times and intensify their daily schedule of [782]
 prayers. Total abstinence is practiced for the forty-eight hours preceding the [785]
 final Mass, performed in the middle of the night before Easter.

Gluttony follows this long deprivation. It is a season of the highest spirits. [261]
 For eight weeks the inexorable requirement to fast on Wednesdays and Fri- [785]
 days is waived. The bins are full with the harvest of wheat, barley, and chick- [241]
 peas. New crops of pulse start to appear in the fields. It is the most favored [585]
 time of all for weddings.

And then, as the Amhara themselves view it, June brings another time of [821]
 sadness. With the onset of the heavy rains come attacks of malaria in the [64]
 lowlands, typhus in the highlands. Swollen streams make travel difficult and

81 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

people everywhere with plenty of food and drink, the Amhara outlook would see in such a condition the prelude to mass civil war.

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The Good Life

When asked what is their chief goal in life, Amhara peasants frequently respond with the expression *sarto mablās* ("having worked, to eat"). This response says many things. It reflects their constant preoccupation with the need to eat. It suggests that having enough to feed oneself, one's family, and one's guests is the farthest horizon toward which the peasants normally aspire. It also implies that in order to eat one should work by the sweat of his brow; it praises independence and self-reliance. [577]

In raising their children Amhara peasants consciously strive to prepare them for making a living on their own. It is shameful to be dependent on others. It is worse yet to steal. Parents instill in their children a dread of becoming a thief. To be called *lēbā*, or "thief," is—except when in fun—a terrible insult. Stealing is felt to be somewhat worse than murder. In a survey of forty rural Amhara youths asked to name the six worst actions in the eyes of the local populace, eighty-five per cent mentioned stealing, and often under two or three different names; while only sixty per cent mentioned killing, and this answer was sometimes qualified as "killing without justification" or "killing by means of poison." One peasant commented on this question by observing, "You never kill a man unless he has done something wrong; but stealing, that is the sin."

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The concept of *sarto mablās* further implies that work is good. It expresses admiration for the industrious farmer. A majority of our TAT respondents preferred that one among twenty-five cards which showed a peasant hard at work in the fields. Agricultural work is idealized in Abyssinia because it promotes the virtues of independence and honesty. If fate concurs, it may even lead to wealth. And in any case it trains and shows one to be *guabax*, a hero in man's work, for it is no small feat to toil from dawn till moonlight in the busy seasons or half a day on an empty stomach on fasting days.

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Nevertheless, those observers are not wholly wrong who speak, like Griaule, of "the little penchant for work among the people."¹⁸ Status considerations keep the Amhara from making a fetish of work as such. He looks down on the work of artisans because of their association with the evil eye. He avoids when possible unskilled manual labor, for traditionally that has been relegated to slaves or servants from "inferior" tribes. Work for wages is likewise deemed undignified. If one must work for someone else, it should be in the context of a more personal relationship—as a retainer, for example. Women are especially sensitive about this and much prefer to serve a man as his temporary wife than as a salaried housekeeper. Finally, although the peasant aspires "to eat, having worked," he is not wholly impervious to the appeal of the more

82 / WAX & GOLD

*565 leisurely style of life of his social superiors. He would prefer, if he could but
 • 461 acquire the necessary servants and corvée labor, to "cause to plow" (*ās-ārāsa*) rather than to plow (*ārāsa*) himself.

*565 If, in sketching the Amhara peasant's conception of the "good life," one
 461 moves from the sphere of goals to that of norms and values, one may say that
 181 while work as such is not conceived as an absolute value, the work of plowing
 597 one's land is regarded as a primary moral responsibility. The peasant's obligations
 183 toward his land extend beyond working it, moreover. At the local level
 [423] he is supposed to keep it within his family, and should be ready to defend his rights to land use against all comers. At the national level he should help to keep the land "free"; that is, out of the hands of all foreigners.

*565 Obligations toward the deity are mostly of a ritual nature. Observing the
 78 fasts and avoiding forbidden foods are perhaps most important of all. It is also
 181 important to wear the symbol of the Ethiopian Christian, the *māṣab*, a simple
 183 neckcord often holding a wrought silver cross. The church should be visited
 [262] and heavy work avoided on the appropriate holy days. Prayers should not be
 [301] neglected. When one passes by a church he should bow three times; when he enters a church compound he should "greet" the ark by kissing some stone or pole of the church building.

*565 The Amhara's ideal of Christian piety does, however, include certain good
 597 works which should be carried out in order to gain God's favor—giving alms
 181 to the indigent, visiting the sick or the prisoner, and aiding the wayfarer (who
 183 is referred to as a "guest of God"). But such injunctions play a slight part in

*565 the Amhara's rhetoric of social morality when compared to his extensive code
 597 of "shames," or *ṇawt*. Stealing and breaking the fasts are among the very
 673 worst *ṇawt*. Other *ṇawt* include murder without good reason or by a shame-
 181 ful means like poison; adultery; insulting or not showing proper respect to-
 183 ward others; failing to observe the conventions concerning engagement and marriage; failing to revenge offenses; and gossiping about others and thereby
 [626] stirring up trouble. Though the sense of being shamed before God provides some measure of internal self-control in these matters, the Amhara peasant avoids immoral acts primarily for fear of being the victim of what others will say (*yelugntā*), so that he will not be "seized by shame" (*hāṣrat*) or suffer humiliation (*wardas*). His prime moral concern is not to be caught in the act of committing some *ṇawt*.

*565 Positive moral obligations to persons outside the circle of close ones are thus
 597 kept to a minimum. Following the conventions of respect toward superiors
 181 and peers is all that is enjoined. The good life for the Amhara peasant is lived
 183 within a minimal, Hobbesian order. The ideal neighbor is defined as one who does not touch others (*saw aynakām*). He does not touch another's land, wife, money, or personal feelings.

*565 Among *zamad*, however, a much warmer ideal of human relations obtains.
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87 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.¹⁶ Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.¹⁷ As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and metalsmiths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writ was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *dabtar*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *dabtar*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.

.107 / *The Emerging Adolescent*

a different identity. Religion and warfare were the two spheres most likely to attract him. Although trade and manual arts were possibilities for those whose industry exceeded their status-consciousness, they were considered the business of other ethnic groups and normally rejected by a self-respecting Amhara. When the Amhara youth left home for a new life, he was usually heading either for the school of some church teacher or the quarters of some chieftain.

Today, as in former times, the role of priest is known from childhood as a possible model for the peasant boy. He and his companions often imitate the clergy and their ceremonies in their play. The wish to become a priest is kindled by a number of interests—desire for the material benefits accorded the clergy; curiosity about the mysteries of the church; envy of the great prestige of the clergy; hope for a better chance of going to heaven after death. During adolescence the outlook of the boy who seeks to become a priest deviates from that of the *goramsā* described above. Instead of the shrill, blood-heating *shillala* war chants he prefers the gentle hymns of the church; instead of the frenzied dancing and singing of the young braves he prefers the schooled dance of the clergy; instead of pursuing women, he is inclined to turn his head the other way when a girl appears.

The military alternative does not seem to be an ideal of Amhara children. They rarely see soldiers; and when they did in former times, it was usually in the unhappy circumstance of seeing the family's reserves plundered. It is not until the time of puberty and after that the great upsurge of aggressive instinct has turned the thoughts of many an Amhara youth to fighting. Chafing under parental domination or bristling with resentment because of being an illegitimate offspring or a stepchild, he may be anxious to turn his hostility against some enemy. He may imagine the free life of a soldier more attractive than the drudgery of the peasant's lot. In the days of feudal armies, he may have heard news about some warlord on the rise and thus have hopes, by attaching himself as a follower, of winning booty and the laurels of a hero, perhaps eventually the powers of a chieftain.

Whether the peasant boy chooses church school or the warpath, his move has frequently been an all-or-none move. The peasant boy can do nothing without the consent of his father, and normally his father will not permit him to do anything except carry on the farmwork and prepare himself to care for his parents in their old age and to inherit the family land. If there should be some sign that the son does not want to continue in his father's footsteps, the latter will do everything he can short of disinheritance—and oftentimes that—to persuade him otherwise.

And so, some restless day, eyes fixed on some alluring goal, the Amhara youth might run away and not be seen again. If he should return, it would

154 / WAX & GOLD

- 643 century, who instituted a number of monthly holidays and prescribed new
 17 liturgical texts; to Menelik, who introduced vaccination and the eucalyptus
 • [461] tree in the twentieth century. For more than a century now kings and em-
 perors have attempted to combat the traditional Abyssinian repugnance for
 manual labor by themselves engaging in arduous physical work on numerous
 occasions.¹¹ Haile Selassie has followed a pattern with abundant precedents in
 introducing the many changes which have characterized his reign.¹²

As object of Abyssinia's highest esteem, symbol of its most cherished values,
 possessor of supreme wealth and power, and author of new norms, the em-
 peror of Ethiopia thus qualifies as an elite in the more technical, sociological
 sense of the word as well as in its original sense of "being chosen."¹³ Indeed,
 if more extreme interpretations of the emperor's significance are to be
 credited, he might even be viewed as the fountainhead of high status for all
 other elites. Thus Bruce, in a famous passage, declares:

The Kings of Abyssinia are above all laws. They are supreme in all causes,
 ecclesiastical and civil; the land and persons of all their subjects are equally
 their property and every inhabitant of the kingdom is born their slave; *if he*
bears a higher rank it is by the king's gift; for his nearest relations are ac-
counted nothing better. [Italics mine.]¹⁴

Such an interpretation, however, is more ideological than analytic. Through-
 out Ethiopian history one can discern definite limits to royal authority, and
 bases of elite status other than imperial favor.

- 121 It is true, as Margery Perham ably sets forth, that a primitive state of tech-
 643 nology and severe geographical obstacles prevented the realization of imperial
 17 power to the degree that the royal ideology would have permitted.¹⁵ Yet this
 failure of the monarchy "to build up any kind of administrative framework
 through which to exercise the absolute powers with which, by tradition and
 consent, it was endowed" was not simply a matter of wanting techniques. It
 also reflected the importance of ultimate values other than that of anointed
 royalty in Abyssinian culture.

- 121 The primary sociological limit to imperial authority was the commitment
 643 of the Abyssinian people to the tradition of their church. Religious conversion
 17 was one change which, at least in the period of Amhara hegemony, could no
 171 longer be tolerated. Za Dengel (1603-4) and Susneyos (1607-32) were
 brought down because of their forthright conversion to Catholicism, and the
 overthrow of Lijj Iyāsu in 1917 was legitimated on the alleged grounds that
 he had become a practicing Muslim. The decline in power of Tēwodros II
 (1855-68) was due in no small measure to the fact that his cavalier policy to-
 ward the clergy resulted in his being branded an enemy of the church.

- 121 A second limit on imperial authority lay in the perennial tendency of cer-
 643 tain regional families to become endowed with an aura of legitimacy in their
 17